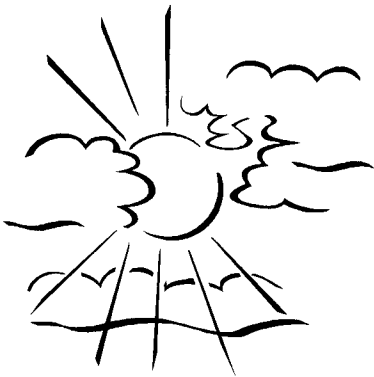


***Department  
of  
Human  
Services***

Prepared by the  
DHS Office of  
Communications  
(517) 373-7394



\*Important story at this spot

# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Tuesday, September 27, 2005**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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# Upcoming budget puts state on starvation diet

Bay City Times Editorial

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

Here we go again.

State lawmakers are getting ready to feed an already malnourished Michigan with a macaroni-and-cheese budget.

Sure, the \$40 billion in compromises that legislators and Gov. Jennifer Granholm hammered out this month will keep Michigan alive.

Barely.

There are even a few tasty nuggets in the mix as lawmakers race toward an Oct. 1 deadline to approve a budget for the state.

Public schools may get \$175 more for each student - the first solid increase in the state grant for schools in three years.

It looks great, but doesn't even cover the costs that have risen in education as the state per-pupil grant lay stagnant.

Saginaw Valley State University and some others also will get an increase in state money.

Others, such as the University of Michigan, won't get much more than last year.

Medicaid and other social welfare programs also apparently are safe from the chopping block. Great.

Schools will get more, poor people will be protected.

Yet we're still left hungry.

It's the result of what Republican legislative leaders call living within our means.

A bare-bones budget fed with meager tax revenues.

It's a starvation diet that Michigan has been on for four years running now.

It's making the state and its formerly admired schools, social services and programs outdoors weaker and weaker.

Yet there's apparently no political majority in Lansing these days that is willing to do the right thing.

Raise taxes.

It doesn't have to be a lot.

In fact, the state can start by reversing the slow-but-steady drop in the state income tax rate of 0.1 percent a year that stopped in 2003 at 3.9 percent.

It was a dandy idea, back in the roaring '90s, when the economy was booming and the state was fat with programs that could be cut here, trimmed there, to make up the difference.

That was when "living within your means" had a stout political ring to it.

Now that the fat is gone, and we flirt with cutting into the lean, that slogan just seems mean.

Our school buildings need repair, classroom budgets for the simplest items are gone. Schools and other public agencies are heading into a heating season that may see the highest fuel prices ever. Our cities and townships are struggling. Our roads desperately need more work.

Michigan still needs to start a concerted push to remake its economy. Granholm and Republicans each have their billion-dollar bond proposals, but a serious effort is going to take more than that. It's all going to take more money.

Good government is supposed to be big brother - not overbearing, but helpful - that provides for the general health and welfare of the people.

But, after four years of undernourished budgets, and looking at another year of starvation-level spending, we've got to wonder.

Brother, where art thou?

- Our View is the editorial opinion of The Bay City Times, as determined by the newspaper's editorial board, which includes the editorial page editor, the editor and the publisher.

# State targets parents Critics call child-support amnesty unrealistic

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

SHARON EMERY  
SAGINAW NEWS LANSING BUREAU

LANSING -- It seems like a good idea: Starting Saturday, Michigan parents behind on their child support payments can avoid penalties, including jail, if they make good on what they owe by the end of the year.

In Saginaw County, that involves 16,000 parents who are more than \$110 million behind. Across the state, 610,000 parents owe more than \$8.5 billion.

"There is no dollar that runs faster back to communities than the child support dollar," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support in the Department of Human Services.

"It pays the rent, it buys groceries and it keeps families off other social service programs ... It can mean the difference for family self-sufficiency."

Trouble is, the average amount owed by Michigan parents behind on child support is about \$14,000.

And coming up with that kind of cash in just 92 days is impossible for most, advocates for noncustodial parents say.

"The intentions are good," said Susan K. Prine, director of Saginaw County Friend of the Court.

"The problem is most of the cases we have warrants on, they owe so much money they can't pay it."

Prosecutor Michael D. Thomas said he cannot comment because he has not seen the plan.

Murray Davis, who heads the Southfield-based Midwest office of the National Family Justice Association, said the state's own studies show that more than 80 percent of overdue child support is owed by those earning at or below the poverty level.

The results of recent amnesty programs elsewhere suggest Michigan may collect just a fraction of what is owed. Other programs generally have not required those who owe money to pay the entire amount during the amnesty period, just a portion and a payment plan started.

About 12 percent of delinquent parents in Arlington County, Va., responded during a two-week amnesty program in August, according to the Virginia Department of Social Services. Those parents paid 7 percent of what they owed -- about \$64,000.

The state of Virginia has made arrangements for the remaining \$1.6 million those parents owe to pay it in installments or through garnisheed wages.

Stephen said that in Michigan, most delinquent parents are already on a payment plan. And she acknowledged that coming up with the entire amount due is a huge hurdle.

"I don't think we will have a very large number of people who are able to participate," she said, "but any money it draws in will be money those families didn't have."

Under Michigan's plan, delinquent parents have to pay at least half of what they owe when they submit their Child Support Amnesty Request Form to their local Friend of the Court office. Then they have to pay the remaining amount past due by Saturday, Dec. 31.

All current support obligations and income withholding orders will remain in effect, but the state will waive existing penalties and add no new ones during the amnesty period.

Parents who have already been arrested on a criminal or civil bench warrant are not eligible, and neither are those for whom felony warrants have been issued. The program is instead aimed at those who have received lesser penalties, such as restrictions on their driver's license.

Michigan disbursed \$1.41 billion in child support payments last year, up \$10 million from 2003.

Stephen thinks collections for this year likely will be flat, given the state's 6.7 percent jobless rate. Payments are ratcheted down based on income.

# Child support bill a Catch-22 Amnesty offered but most can't afford it

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

BY SHARON EMERY  
Ann Arbor News Bureau

LANSING - It seems like a good idea: Starting Saturday, Michigan parents behind on their child support payments can avoid penalties, including jail, if they make good on what they owe by the end of the year.

The amnesty program is designed to get the 610,000 parents who owe Michigan children more than \$8.5 billion to pay up as painlessly as possible.

In Washtenaw County, there were 14,179 child support arrearage cases, involving a total of \$219,531,698, as of June 30. In Livingston County, parents owed a total of \$33,928,129 in 4,466 arrearage cases.

"There is no dollar that runs faster back to communities than the child support dollar," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support in the Department of Human Services.

"It pays the rent, it buys groceries and it keeps families off other social service programs ... It can mean the difference for family self-sufficiency."

Trouble is, the average amount owed by Michigan parents behind on child support is about \$14,000.

And coming up with that kind of cash in just 92 days is impossible for most, advocates for noncustodial parents say.

Murray Davis, who heads the Midwest office of the National Family Justice Association, said the legislation authorizing the amnesty program was dubbed the "rich man's relief bill" in public hearings. The state's own studies show that over 80 percent of overdue child support is owed by those earning at or below the poverty level, he said.

The program "unfortunately falls into the category of only window dressing for our group," said Davis, who's based in Southfield.

The results of recent amnesty programs elsewhere suggest Michigan may collect just a fraction of what is owed. Other programs generally have not required that the entire amount due be paid during the amnesty period, just a portion and a payment plan started.

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All current support obligations and income withholding orders will remain in effect, but existing penalties will be waived and no new ones added during the amnesty period.

Forms are available at local Friend of the Court offices; online at [michigan.gov/dhs](http://michigan.gov/dhs) (click on Child Support under Quick Links); or by calling toll-free (866) 540-0008.

Parents who have already been arrested on a criminal or civil bench warrant are not eligible, and neither are those for whom felony warrants have been issued. The program is instead aimed at those who have received lesser penalties, such as restrictions on their driver's license.

"There are parents worried that enforcement tools are being used more broadly these days, and some parents want to ensure that that doesn't happen to them," Stephen said.

Wiping the slate clean is one of the reasons state Rep. Alexander Lipsey, D-Kalamazoo, sponsored the legislation creating the amnesty program.

"Through it, good-faith payers can fulfill their obligation, children will receive much-needed funds and we will not waste jail space on cash-strapped payers," he said in announcing the program.

Michigan disbursed \$1.41 billion in child support payments last year, up \$10 million from 2003.

Stephen says he thinks collections for this year likely will be flat, given the state's 6.7 percent jobless rate. Payments are ratcheted down based on income.

"I'm concerned because the economy has continued to be a problem, and a parent can't pay if there's difficulty finding a job," Stephen said.

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# Few will be able to take advantage of child-support amnesty

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

By Sharon Emery and Steven Harmon  
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- At one time, Bill Schansema owed his ex-wife \$16,000 in child support. Through a court action that took into account his earnings, he reduced his debt to \$4,800. Still, the 47-year-old Sparta resident says he will not be able to take advantage of the state's child-support amnesty program, which allows noncustodial parents to rid themselves of any penalties if they pay their entire debt by the end of the year.

"It's virtually impossible to pay it off at one time," Schansema said. "If you have an outstanding debt, chances of securing a loan are impossible. It's really very frustrating. You want to do the right thing, be supportive of your children, follow the rules. But it's like dropping off into an abyss and trying to get back."

The amnesty program is designed to get the 610,000 parents who owe Michigan children more than \$8.5 billion to pay as painlessly as possible.

"There is no dollar that runs faster back to communities than the child-support dollar," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support in the Department of Human Services. "It pays the rent, it buys groceries and it keeps families off other social service programs. ... It can mean the difference for family self-sufficiency."

Trouble is, the average amount owed by Michigan parents behind on child support is about \$14,000. And coming up with that kind of cash in just 92 days is impossible for most, advocates for noncustodial parents say.

The results of recent amnesty programs elsewhere suggest Michigan may collect just a fraction of what is owed. Other programs generally have not required that the entire amount due be paid during the amnesty period, just a portion and a payment plan started.

Murray Davis, who heads the Midwest office of the National Family Justice Association, said the legislation authorizing the amnesty program was dubbed the "rich man's relief bill" in public hearings. The state's studies

show more than 80 percent of overdue child support is owed by those earning at or below the poverty level, he said.

"(The program) unfortunately falls into the category of only window dressing for our group," said Davis, who is based in Southfield.

Stephen said in Michigan, most delinquent parents already are on a payment plan. And she acknowledged coming up with the entire amount due is a huge hurdle.

"I don't think we will have a very large number of people who are able to participate," she said, "but any money it draws in will be money those families didn't have."

Schansema's ex-wife, Theresa Mazzola, likes the idea of an amnesty program. But she doubts Schansema could pay off the debt for their two children.

"I think it would be great if they could do it," said Mazzola, 40, of Jenison. "All those fathers and mothers could pay them off. But you'll find that some won't be able to do that."

Under Michigan's plan, delinquent parents have to pay at least half of what they owe when they submit their Child Support Amnesty Request Form to their local Friend of the Court office.

Then, they have to pay the remaining past due amount by Dec. 31.



All current support obligations and income withholding orders remain in effect, but existing penalties will be waived and no new ones added during the amnesty period.

Child-support debt is a complex problem, said John Cole, Kent County's Friend of the Court.

Nearly two-thirds of custodial parents regularly pay child support. But a number of factors cause parents to fall behind, including debt that mounts while the noncustodial parent is in jail or prison.

"Many are on unemployment or are disabled or on Social Security," he said.

The state has tried to break down barriers by cutting the interest rates in half, from 8 percent to about 4 percent.

"Arrears won't grow as fast," Cole said. "That may help people eventually pay it off."

Kent County's arrearages have grown so large -- more than \$400 million owed by noncustodial parents -- that "we've got to start controlling it," Cole said.

Forms are available at local Friend of the Court offices; online at [michigan.gov/dhs](http://michigan.gov/dhs) (click on Child Support under Quick Links); or by calling toll-free (866) 540-0008.

# Plan lets parents make up payments

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

By Sharon Emery\  
Jackson Citizen Patriot Lansing Bureau

Starting Saturday, Michigan parents behind on their child support payments can avoid penalties, including jail, if they make good on what they owe by the end of the year.

The amnesty program is designed to get the 610,000 parents who owe Michigan children more than \$8.5 billion to pay up as painlessly as possible.

"There is no dollar that runs faster back to communities than the child support dollar," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Office of Child Support in the Department of Human Services. "... It can mean the difference for family self-sufficiency."

Trouble is, the average amount owed by Michigan parents behind on child support is about \$14,000. Jackson County has 10,535 cases involving \$101,073,519, an average of \$9,594. And coming up with that kind of cash in just 92 days is impossible for most, advocates for noncustodial parents say.

Andy Crisenbery, director of Jackson County Friend of the Court, said the amnesty program is worth trying but he's not sure how effective it will be.

Crisenbery said encouraging parents who owe child support to come in to the office and work out a payment program would probably produce better results than offering them amnesty for paying off the entire debt.

"Most people can't pay it in full or they wouldn't be behind in the first place," Crisenbery said.

# Hurricane evacuees to return to La. with new son

Associated Press

September 27, 2005

DURAND - Only weeks after traveling to Michigan to escape Hurricane Katrina, a Louisiana family has welcomed a new son into the world.

At 6 pounds, 9 ounces, and 20 1/2 inches long, Brendon Anthony Dennis was born last week at Memorial Healthcare in Owosso.

"It's funny. I jokingly told Jill on the way up (to the hospital) that she was going to have the baby in Michigan, but I never actually thought we'd be up here that long," father Matthew Dennis told The Argus-Press of Owosso. "Now that it's happened, I'm glad we did."

Both parents have been eagerly awaiting Brendon's birth since the drive up from their home in Bush, La.

"It was definitely a relief," Matthew Dennis said. "It couldn't have gone any better than it did. It was an easy delivery."

The Michigan birth was also a treat for Linda VanWoert of Durand, the baby's grandmother.

"They let me cut the umbilical cord," she said. "I've been telling everyone."

Matthew Dennis, a Durand native, said Brendon is the second family member to be born in Michigan.

The storm did little damage to their home, but it has no water or electricity. Matthew Dennis, who owns a bail bonding business, said the hurricane also caused flood damage to at least one of his offices.

So with seven children and a baby on the way, the couple decided to take everything they could and leave. After a rough trip north, they arrived at Van Woert's to a room filled with blankets, pillows, air mattresses and care packages.

But with Brendon's arrival, the family is discussing the trip back home.

"We still have a couple things to do up here, but we're all anxious to go back home," Matthew Dennis said.

"Everyone's been great up here, but Louisiana's our home."

Note: Shiawassee County DHS assisted this family with housing and Medicaid.

# Hurricane Katrina evacuees welcome their newest family member at MHC

By DREW ACRE

Argus-Press Staff Writer

**DURAND** — The Dennis family has a lot to be thankful for.

The Bush, La., family recently added one more member to their family with the birth of Brendon Anthony Dennis earlier this week at Memorial Healthcare in Owosso.

"It's funny, I jokingly told Jill on the way up (to the hospital) that she was going to have the baby in Michigan, but I never actually thought we'd be up here that long," said father, Matthew Dennis. "Now that it's happened, I'm glad we did."

At six-pounds, nine-ounces and 20-and-a-half inches long, Brendon was born Monday with a perfect bill of health. A relief to both parents who have been eagerly awaiting Brendon's birth since the drive up several weeks ago.

"It was definitely a relief," said Dennis. "It couldn't have gone any better than it did. It was an easy delivery — quick and there were no surgeries."

Jill said the first person she called was the oldest daughter, Krystal, 15.

"We had made a bet with the kids over the name of the baby — if he was born with light hair it would be Gavin, dark hair — Brendon. Krystal and I both liked the name Brendon, so when he was born with a full head of dark hair I couldn't wait to tell her."

Linda VanWoert of Durand, grandmother of the newborn, had another reason to be excited.

"They let me cut the umbilical cord," she bragged. "I've been telling everyone."

A former Durand native, Dennis said Brendon is the second family member to be born in Michigan. Their second oldest daughter, Samantha, 13, was born in Mt. Clemens.

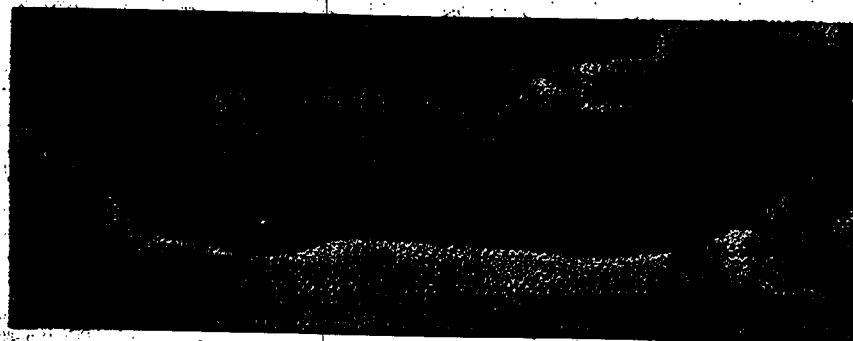
The family have been residing in Durand the last several weeks after their home was caught in the destructive wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Though the storm did little damage to their house, mostly uprooting the trees and fencing



Argus-Press Photos/Carol Mattheico

**THE DENNIS FAMILY**, who came to Durand from Louisiana temporarily after Hurricane Katrina, pose on the porch of Linda Van Woert (grandmother of the newborn) in Durand. Back row, from left, are Jill Samantha, Krystal and Jeff. Middle row, from left, newborn Brendon, Amber and Kyle (held by dad). And in the front, from left, are Elijah, Matthew and Desmond.



**THE NEWEST** addition to the Dennis family, of Louisiana, is Brendon, born last week at Owosso's Memorial Healthcare.

# NEWBORN

Continued from Page 1A

in their backyard, it left their home without water or electricity.

"We literally went to bed at night and woke up to 155 mile per hour winds," said Dennis. "It sounded like a turbine engine."

Jill said there was another sound that took her by surprise.

"It sounded like every frog and cricket across the state was in our yard," she said.

Dennis, who owns a nation-wide bail bonding business, said it also caused flood damage to at least one of his offices.

So with five young children and a baby on the way, it didn't take the Dennis family long to decide what to do.

"We picked up everything we could for the baby and just left," said Jill.

The trip up was difficult. Gas stations were congested with people trying to leave the state, roads were blocked by downed trees and debris and there was no way to call out.

It wasn't until the family reached Arkansas - three days later - that they were able to make their first phone call to VanWoert.

"I couldn't believe it, I felt like the weight of the world had been lifted off my shoulders," said VanWoert. "I was crying, Jill was crying. We were both just so happy to hear from each other."

The Dennis family arrived at VanWoerts to a room filled with blankets, pillows, air mattresses and care packages.

"It was great, I had a bed to sleep in instead of the car," said Krystal.

Since their arrival in Durand, Dennis said they've been overwhelmed by the generosity that has been heaped upon them by area churches, organizations and local residents.

"The assistance from everybody around the county has been unreal," said Dennis. "It's really made this a lot easier."

Most the kids - Amber, 7, Samantha, Krystal, Elijah, 7, and Desmond, 8, - have all been enrolled at Durand Area Schools. While the other two youngsters - Kyle, 1, and Matthew, 3, - have been playing at grandma's house.

"Right now we're just trying to keep things as normal as possible for the kids," said Dennis. "To help keep their minds off what's happened."

Samantha said she really enjoys school in Durand, especially with all the new friends she's made.

"It's been good. I've made a lot of new friends," said Samantha. "And we have less hours in school here and less classes to go to."

Krystal agreed, and said Durand reminds her of home.

"It's quiet up here, you can gather your thoughts," she said.

Yet, now with Brendon's birth, the family is beginning to discuss the trip home.

"We still have a couple things to do up here, but we're all anxious to go back home," said Dennis. "Everyone's been great up here, but Louisiana's our home."

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

## **Hurricane fallout**

### **Michigan can't keep tabs on evacuees**

By John Wisely / The Detroit News

Even as Hurricane Rita chased more people from their homes, some local officials were growing frustrated trying to track evacuees already here from the previous Gulf Coast hurricane. State, federal and local agencies are reaching out to hurricane victims, but no one is keeping a central record of who receives which type of aid. County leaders fear that without such a database, it will be impossible to detect fraud, avoid wasted resources and determine which agencies should pay hotels and other businesses for services they provided to evacuees. Oakland County officials said the state's decision to not issue identification cards to evacuees has caused confusion. State officials had planned to provide such a card, but later decided against it. "The state abandoned the ID card," said Deputy Oakland County Executive Robert Daddow. "It was the mechanism for tracking what services have been provided to whom." Without it, local health officers, nonprofit groups and other service providers face the possibility of duplicating the work of others who have already dealt with the individuals, Daddow said. Michigan officials said they aren't creating IDs for evacuees because states affected by the hurricane are expediting their own IDs for their residents who have dispersed. The Federal Emergency Management Agency is responsible for registering evacuees who will receive federal assistance such as payment for hotel rooms. "(Tracking evacuees) is probably more of a question for FEMA," said Maureen Sorbet, spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services. "We are tracking the people who are applying for assistance from us." Sorbet said FEMA's most recent count of registered evacuees in Michigan listed 3,012. About 1,100 of those also have registered for financial and other assistance through the state. But there is no state database of all the evacuees, and a FEMA spokeswoman said the agency won't release a list of names of people who have registered in the state. "It's privacy," said Mary Margaret Walker, a FEMA spokeswoman in Washington. "We are unable to provide any information about specific disaster victims." Walker acknowledged that the lack of names could lead to redundancies but said that victims should tell service providers if they have already been through the system somewhere else. George Miller, director of the Oakland County Health Division, said early estimates of the number of arriving evacuees were exaggerated. "The confusion has been more of drain than the actual servicing of these people," Miller said.

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# Locals swamp evacuee job fair

By Ron French / The Detroit News

September 27, 2005

**DETROIT** -- A job fair for victims of Hurricane Katrina was overwhelmed Monday by victims of an economic storm, as unemployed Metro Detroiters searched for work of their own.

The job fair at the main Detroit Public Library was billed as a means for Michigan companies to help evacuees now temporarily living in Metro Detroit. But as hundreds of Detroit residents lined up in the library hallway Monday morning, the event instead became a symbol of the help needed by the city's own residents.

More than 80 percent of the nearly 400 people filling out applications at the Katrina job fair were from Metro Detroit.

"There are a lot of people who need jobs," said Bianca Dave, 23, of Detroit, as she filled out four job applications. "They (Katrina victims) need jobs. But I need a job. Bad."

More than 2,000 evacuees from Louisiana and Mississippi have sought shelter in southeast Michigan since the storm hit four weeks ago. Since then, many of the victims have been inundated with offers of assistance. Some are staying and dining for free at local hotels. Church groups have taken some on shopping trips. Many attended a luncheon with the governor. Thousands of articles of clothing and toiletries have been donated.

While there has been an outpouring of compassion for those made homeless by a hurricane 1,000 miles away, those made homeless locally by bad luck or bad decisions feel they're being ignored.

"If you don't have a dramatic story, you can't get help," said Toisan Hall, 30, of Detroit, who last week went to a Southfield hotel housing Katrina victims to try to get help for herself. "We've been out on the street all summer, sleeping on our church bus, then was sleeping in an abandoned home, but I got kicked out. You got people here who were battling waves. But we were just all alone."

Monday's job fair, co-sponsored by Hartford Memorial Baptist Church and America Works, was the latest in a series of job fairs arranged for the Katrina victims, many of whom were left homeless by the hurricane. But as fliers for the fair were posted across Detroit and distributed at churches Sunday, library officials discovered there were others who needed jobs.

"We're getting hundreds of calls (from Detroit residents) asking if they can come, too," said Conrad Welsing, spokesman for the Detroit Public Library. "The first person who showed up, we asked where he was from, and he said, 'the west side.'"

Michigan has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation, at 6.7 percent in August; Detroit's unemployment rate is 14.2 percent. Yet Monday's job fair for hurricane victims was the first job fair hosted by the library. The response opened Welsing's eyes to a problem harder to see on the street corner than on CNN.

When the job fair closed at 2 p.m., 321 area residents had applied for jobs, compared to 77 people from the South.

"If anything, this shows there is a need," Welsing said.

Calvin Hayes Jr. of New Orleans came to the job fair. His employer wants him to move to Baton Rouge as soon as he can find a place for Hayes to live. In the meantime, Hayes wants to find a temporary job because he's going stir-crazy sitting in a hotel room in Southfield.

"Everybody's been very helpful," Hayes said. "They can't be more helpful."

While Hayes was looking for a temporary job to pass the time until he returned south, Wayne Tolliver hoped to find work so he could afford an apartment. Tolliver was recently released from prison and is homeless.

"I can understand (helping) the homeless coming in (to Detroit), but there are a lot of homeless here, too," said Tolliver, 51. "I went to one shelter and they said they were only helping hurricane people right now."

Tolliver is angered by the level of assistance offered to Katrina victims compared to the aid offered to Detroit's needy. "We've been here all along," Tolliver said. "Don't forget the people here."

A steady stream of job applicants filled out applications to work for Fed Ex. "I've only seen one person so far not from Detroit," said Fed Ex's Kathy Smith. "I'm not sure a lot of people from Katrina are ready to put down roots here."

Smith wasn't surprised at the number of Detroiters who showed up at the Katrina job fair. "Jobs are scarce here like everywhere," she said.

Advocates for the poor don't begrudge the goodwill being bestowed on the hurricane victims, but they hope to harness some of that assistance to help Metro Detroit's most needy citizens.

"Where were the people before now?" said Linda McCrimmon, who has assisted evacuees at the former Ramada Inn Southfield, a hotel that has become a clearinghouse for donations. "No disrespect to the people helping now, but where is the generosity the rest of the year? We have a crisis every day with the homeless."

*You can reach Ron French at (313) 222-2175 or [rfrench@detnews.com](mailto:rfrench@detnews.com).*



Michigan Report

September 26, 2005

## **HOUSE DEMOCRATS CALL FOR UNIVERSAL PRE-SCHOOL**

Michigan could see fewer prisoners over the years if it invested the money now in preschool programs, House Democrats said Monday as they announced a plan to provide pre-school education for all children not already enrolled in plans.

The program is aimed at reaching those children whose families cannot afford to get them into private pre-school programs, Democrats said. If the legislation passed, in the first year alone that would mean doubling the number of children in the state's school readiness program from 25,000 to 50,000.

By 2010, the program should ensure that all estimated 140,000 four-year old children at that time not otherwise enrolled in programs would be in the state program, legislators said.

The announcement was made at a series of press conferences held across the state.

At the Lansing press conference, Rep. Andy Meisner (D-Ferndale) and Rep. Pam Byrnes (D-Dexter) called the program an economic issue as much as a family issue. Boosting early learning will not only help reduce long-term social problems such as crime, it will also promote better overall skills and higher levels of employment.

For every \$1 spent the state will see a long-term return of \$17, Mr. Meisner said.

But the program would cost \$85 million in the first year. Asked if the state could put in the money needed to cover the cost, Mr. Meisner said the state finds the hundreds of millions needed to put prisoners behind bars so it could fund the cost of expanding pre-school.

Ms. Byrnes said the program is aimed at those children who do not now have access to a program either because their families can't afford one or there is none in the local schools. Mr. Meisner said the emphasis would likely be on expanding programs in local schools, even though schools now are stretched.

Other parts of the package would include legislation to give scholarships so more teachers would be qualified to teach young children, and a bill requiring a quality rating on licensed day-care facilities.

Rep. Brian Palmer (R-Romeo), chair of the House Education Committee, said that while there would be benefits to the program – though he disputed with the \$17 payoff for

every \$1 spent – said that the program comes at a time when the state should focus its resources more on middle school problems where many of the deficiencies in programs like mathematics and science show.

Then there is the cost issues, and Mr. Palmer said he had no idea where the money would come for the program.

“We have to focus our priorities,” he said, “and that means middle schools.”

And if the program were to go ahead, then the state should look at making the program open to independent schools, including the possibility of voucher programs.

## **Bills call for 4-year-olds to get free preschool**

### **State GOP says there's no money; Dems see payoffs in the long run.**

PUBLISHED: September 27, 2005

By Chad Selweski  
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Free preschool for all of Michigan's 140,000 4-year-olds would be provided at a cost of \$400 million, under legislation introduced Monday by state House Democrats.

The three-bill package is inspired by numerous studies that show early childhood education leads to more school success, less juvenile delinquency and better jobs for kids later in life.

"Too many children enter kindergarten unprepared. We cannot let our children fall behind at an early age," said state Rep. Lisa Wojno, a Warren Democrat. "Early childhood education paves the way to a lifetime of learning."

Wojno attended a Mount Clemens news conference -- one of several held across the state Monday by House Democrats -- with her 3-year-old child, Audrey, a preschool student.

The legislation calls for a gradual, 5-year expansion of preschool, starting with an expenditure of \$85 million in 2006 to double the number of 4-year-olds in preschool from 25,000 to 50,000. By 2010, the goal is have free preschool available to all Michigan 4-year-olds, providing them a boost heading into kindergarten.

With preschool costs averaging \$5,700 a year, Democratic lawmakers say that many middle class families who don't qualify for government child care programs are unable to afford schooling prior to kindergarten.

"Preschool pays great dividends. For every \$1 invested in preschool that means \$17 saved later in a child's life," said Rep. Frank Accavitti, an Eastpointe Democrat. "Children in preschool develop a strong work ethic and an appreciation for completing tasks."

Accavitti was joined Monday at a Mount Clemens Public Library press conference by Wojno and Democratic Reps. Fred Miller of Mount Clemens and Steve Bieda of Warren.

Under the legislation, parents would not receive subsidies or vouchers; instead the Michigan School Readiness Program would be expanded to accommodate all 4-year olds.

That program currently serves low-income children by offering early childhood education at public school buildings.

Nearly 60,000 Michigan children are not in private preschool and do not qualify for the federal Head Start program or the state's school readiness program, said Steve Manchester, of the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children.

The federal Head Start program is for children who are from families at or below the poverty line, which is \$19,350 for a family of four. The state school readiness program is for children from poor families that earn slightly more than the poverty line and those considered at-risk.

The two programs have about 61,000 enrollees of all ages, Manchester said.

Two states, Georgia and Oklahoma, already provide preschool to all 4-year-olds. Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm has urged a greater emphasis on pre-kindergarten learning.

The Democratic legislation would offer scholarships for those pursuing a teaching career in early childhood education and a rating system to let parents assess private preschool facilities.

Despite strong support for the proposal from many education advocacy groups, the Democrats face criticism in the state Capitol because they have not offered a way to pay for the plan. With the state facing constant budget deficits, the Democrats have only put forward a determination to make preschool a priority in the next state budget, which would take effect Oct. 1, 2006.

Matt Resch, spokesman for Republican House Speaker Craig DeRoche of Novi, said that while it is important to educate children at an early age, the expansion proposed by Democrats is too expensive. The governor and state lawmakers have struggled to balance the state budget in recent years as tax revenues have dropped.

"A lot of public schools have gone to more comprehensive preschool programs," Resch said. "A mandate of this size is going to be hugely expensive for the state and taxpayers."

Wojno said the GOP is ignoring the long-term benefits to state budgets for the court system, the prison system and social programs.

"I feel we're already paying for this," she said. "Why not pay for it -- and pay far less -- at the front end?"

AP contributed to this report.

# Medicaid Co-Pays

## Even small ones will cost people in health

Detroit Free Press Editorial

*September 27, 2005*

Among the worst steps taken to balance Michigan's budget is a new set of co-pays that Medicaid recipients must come up with for doctor's visits and hospital stays.

The amounts may seem small to most people: \$2 for a doctor's office visit, \$3 for a trip to the emergency room, \$50 for the first day in a hospital (with no additional co-pays for longer stays). The amounts may also seem small, and hardly worth collecting, to doctors and hospitals -- except that the state also cut their Medicaid reimbursements by 3%. Sadly, the co-pays may be essential to their own survival.

For this hassle -- and for some people, it will mean choosing between a jar of peanut butter for the week or their doctor's appointment -- the state expects to gain all of \$2.3 million in the next fiscal year. That's what Lansing officials, when their pet spending projects are in play, would refer to as a rounding error. (The total Medicaid budget for next year is \$2.95 billion.) But it's one with real-life consequences.

At least one study has shown that even small co-pays can cause Medicaid patients to skip or delay doctor's visits. Some co-pays are believed to influence behavior -- for example, charging a co-pay for emergency room care, hoping that prompts more people to schedule less costly doctor's office visits.

But if that were the aim here, the co-pay schedule would have left doctors' visits free. And what sense is there in charging \$50 for being sent to the hospital -- a decision over which no one has individual control? If the doctor tells you to check in, you go.

All this has Gov. Jennifer Granholm's blessing. She is expected to sign the health budget bill this week. That makes for a grim year ahead, during which one of the universities ought to study the impact. It would be great to be proved wrong, but it's hard to believe these co-pays will lead to a healthier Michigan -- and it's entirely possible that, in the long run, they'll cost more in care for complications than they can ever hope to raise.

# Filling gap in dental coverage

GrandRapids Press Editorial

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

Two years after pulling routine dental care for adults out of the Medicaid budget, Michigan lawmakers wisely have reversed course. Filling that hole in coverage can prevent small problems from becoming big ones. Dental care isn't something that should be viewed as a luxury. The lack of basic dental care can lead to a host of serious problems that cost more to fix than a simple check-up.

Starting Oct. 1, approximately 600,000 adults on Medicaid will again be able to see a dentist for nonemergency care. The benefit was cut in 2003 in an effort to trim about \$10 million out of Michigan's \$7 billion Medicaid budget, the state-federal health-insurance plan for the poor and disabled. Emergency dental treatment for people with severe pain, swelling and infections remained available through Medicaid. Emergency dental care, however, ought not take the place of regular preventive maintenance. Having their teeth removed should not be the only time poor adults get to see a dentist.

Not getting regular dental care involves more than teeth and getting a few cavities. Though untreated cavities can turn into problems requiring root canals or extractions, the lack of routine dental services affects health and lives in other ways as well. Nutrition can suffer when people can't chew food properly, without pain, or at all because of dental problems. People with toothaches or abscesses can't concentrate on their jobs or other activities. The inability to get corrective or restorative dental care also can limit employment opportunities.

Poor dental health can complicate other ailments, including diabetes, and lead to periodontal disease, which can contribute to heart disease or to adverse pregnancy outcomes.

When it comes to dental care, an ounce of prevention can be worth more than a pound of cure. Michigan lawmakers were wise to realize it.

# Health, service info soon will be phone call away

By NATALIE LOMBARDO  
Of The Oakland Press

September 26, 2005

With the swift dial of 2-1-1, Oakland County residents will be able to access a wealth of local health and human service information.

"You get answers with one phone call. If a person had health care, utility and welfare questions, they would be assisted by an operator with the resources to get that person all the information they need," said Judy Palnau, spokesperson for the Lansing-based Michigan Public Service Commission.

An initiative of the United Way for Southeastern Michigan, the call center will be available to people in Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties in late December - 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

The call center, which will have bilingual associates, will refer callers to such services as child-care needs, adult day care, after-school programs, employment training for laid-off workers, family counseling, crisis intervention, mentoring and volunteer opportunities and many others.

"It's important with all of the information overload that there's a place people can go to get their questions answered. Navigating a maze of information and getting answers to a simple question can be difficult," Palnau added.

Residents can make a 2-1-1 call free of charge from a land line and officials are working on accessing the number from cell phones. All calls are confidential.

The service can also disseminate public health and preparedness information during emergencies.

"It would be a critical part of times of crisis for homeland security. It can really bring people together and identify the resources they need," said Patricia Ellis, United Way Foundation for Southeastern Michigan director of media relations, noting that an associate is currently in Louisiana setting up the service as part of Hurricane Katrina relief efforts.

United Way for Southeastern Michigan has secured commitments totaling \$2.9 million for the call center, and plans to raise an additional \$4.9 million in private and public funding to cover operational costs for the center for the next three years.

Currently, there are 156 active 2-1-1 systems in the United States.

Bloomfield Hills-based Common Ground Sanctuary, a nonprofit crisis intervention agency, is a partner in the endeavor - employees will be fielding Oakland County calls.

And Common Ground Sanctuary's services will be conveyed through the 2-1-1 database.

"Our services may be what callers need, or we can give them other options, too. It's going to be a true success and benefit for everyone involved," said Tony Rothschild, Common Ground Sanctuary president and CEO.

Currently, people find out about Common Ground Sanctuary and similar agencies through the media, community outreach and referrals.

Also on the 2-1-1 database will be Pontiac-based Oakland Family Services, a nonprofit organization that provides a range of services to support the needs of families, including foster care, adoption, child care, substance abuse and mental health care, and services for the elderly.

Michael Earl, Oakland Family Services president and CEO, said 2-1-1 will be helpful to service agencies, too.

"For those of us providing human services, it will be a significant way to collect information about what's going on in the community. We'll be able to track the trends, the kind of people who call, what they're calling for," Earl said. "It will help with corresponding services, avoid redundancy of services and help with planning to make sure services available are ones that are needed."

It's estimated that the 2-1-1 call center will field 140,000 calls annually, connecting people with more than 5,000 programs and services throughout the tri-county area.



# Extended care for elderly criticized

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

By Brad Florybflory@citpat.com -- 768-4925

Michigan's system for long-term care for elderly and disabled people needs reform, officials said at a town hall-style meeting Monday in Jackson.

"We have an incredibly fragmented long-term care system in Michigan," said Roanne Chaney, chairwoman of a Long Term Task Force that recently issued recommendations to Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Legislature.

"It's confusing. It's piecemeal. And the pieces don't all fit together as a system."

About 75 people attended the meeting, organized by state Sen. Mark Schauer, D-Battle Creek. Many voiced stories of frustration.

Arlene Shepherd of Jackson said she felt "abandoned" when she became a caregiver for a mother diagnosed with a brain tumor in 1989.

"My mother was scared to death of nursing homes and begged me not to put her into a nursing home," Shepherd said.

Her mother died during what Shepherd described as an unnecessarily long and troublesome ordeal to get her in to see a doctor.

"She could have lived longer," Shepherd said.

"The trauma of me taking her to the doctor's office, I know, shortened her life."

Experts said programs have improved since 1989, but there is still a waiting list for Medicaid recipients to receive care in their own homes instead of nursing homes.

"We have to begin using our state's resources in a way that supports families instead of fragmenting and tearing them apart," said Jane Church, long-term care specialist for the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging.

State government soon will provide more money for in-home care for people already in nursing homes, Chaney said, partly because that saves money.

However, the state is resisting funding for in-home care to families now "going it alone," she said.

"The fear is, they are going to blow the budget," Chaney said. "So the state is taking a very incremental approach."

One recommendation of the task force chaired by Chaney is creation of "single points of entry" where families can get information about all options.

Other complaints raised at the town hall meeting included lax state oversight of bad nursing homes and low pay for caregivers who work for both nursing homes and home-health agencies.

# Former police officer to be released

Trace Christenson

*The Battle Creek Enquirer*

A former Albion police officer likely will be released from jail as early as today after his bond was reduced.

Calhoun County Circuit Judge Stephen Miller agreed Monday to reduce the bond for Kyle Chaney, 39, charged with taking explicit photographs of a young girl.

Chaney was being held on \$500,000 bond but his attorney, Mark Webb of Marshall argued the amount was excessive for the charges.

"I was shocked at the amount of the bond," Webb told Judge Miller. "I don't know why it is set at a half a million dollars."

Chaney, 2005 Officer of the Year for the Albion Department of Public Safety, was charged in August with producing and possessing child sexually explicit material, accosting a child for immoral purposes and second-degree child abuse.

Investigators from the Calhoun County sheriff department have alleged Chaney photographed a 16-year-old girl.

Earlier this month the 14-year veteran was fired from the Albion department after Chief Eric Miller said an internal investigation was completed.

Also this month, Webb and Assistant Kalamazoo County Prosecutor Chris Johnson said they are negotiating a possible plea agreement which would allow Chaney to enter a plea to one count of producing child sexually explicit material and contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

The agreement, if reached, would mean Chaney might spend time in jail but not be sentenced to prison, and then be placed on probation for five years.

When Chaney was arraigned on the charge, prosecutors argued that he might be a danger to himself or others but Webb said Monday there is no evidence Chaney has threatened to do anything to anyone, including himself.

Miller said he agreed and set bond at \$50,000. Chaney can be released after posting \$5,000, which Webb said is probable.

Conditions of the bond include that Chaney live with relatives in Climax, wear an electronic tether, not possess firearms and stay away from anyone under 17.

*Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or [tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com](mailto:tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com).*

Originally published September 27, 2005

IN BRIEF

Ann Arbor News

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

## **Boy, 5, found hours after missing bus**

A 5-year-old Superior Township boy apparently wandered around playing for several hours after school Monday afternoon while his parents and police frantically searched for him. The boy was found uninjured more than four hours after he failed to get off his school bus, Washtenaw County Sheriff's Cmdr. Dave Egeler said.

The boy's mother called police around 5 p.m. and said her son should have returned on the bus from Ford Elementary School in Ypsilanti Township around 3:45 p.m., Egeler said. The parents had been unsuccessfully searching for him, Egeler said.

Deputies discovered some of the boy's belongings in Appleridge Park, near the school, Egeler said. Around 8 p.m., the child was found playing near a friend's home in Westridge mobile home park in the 1500 block of Ridge Road in Superior Township, less than a mile from the school, Egeler said.

The child apparently walked a friend to the bus, but never got on himself, and walked away, Egeler said. He had been wandering and playing, and was not harmed, Egeler said.

## **FROM OUR READERS: Don't shut youth prison**

Detroit Free Press

*September 26, 2005*

In response to your Sept. 22 editorial "Veto Punk Prison: Youth facility deserves to be cut from budget": Contrary to the belief that the Michigan Youth Correctional Facility is inefficient, the state auditor general revised the annual audit findings to conclude that MYCF was the second most effective maximum prison at \$106.38 per prisoner/day; Marquette Branch was first at \$97.34. The MYCF has been accredited by the American Correctional Association as meeting the professional standards of care for the housing and care of young male offenders, also reaffirmed in the audit report. Any service deficiencies have been resolved.

Nationally, Michigan has the sixth largest prisoner population, fourth highest staffing costs, third least efficient staff-to-prisoner ratio, and the fourth highest cost to house one prisoner. The governor admits the state will need 1,000 more beds in a year, thus we will need every available bed for additional prisoners, including the 480 beds at the MYCF. The Legislature has identified sufficient funds to keep the MYCF open. If the governor is serious about saving money and keeping jobs, she shouldn't veto the MYCF funding.

Goeff Hansen

State Representative 100th District, Hart

# Assailant in bus stabbing pleads guilty

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

lturner@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8564

A Gull Lake High School student accused of stabbing a younger student in the back and arm in February 2004 has pleaded guilty to a reduced charge.

Alexandra Riel, now 17, pleaded guilty Friday to assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder, which carries a maximum term of 10 years in prison.

Although Riel was 15 at the time of the incident, which occurred on a Gull Lake Community Schools bus, she was charged as an adult with assault with intent to commit murder, which carries a life sentence or any number of years in prison, and with carrying a concealed weapon, a five-year felony.

Standing before Kalamazoo County Circuit Judge William G. Schma with her mother and stepfather, Riel spoke quietly, responding to questions from her attorney and the judge with single-word answers.

Riel, a native of Great Britain, is being treated for mental-health issues at a Grand Rapids facility, where she will remain at least until sentencing. She had been found competent to stand trial, which was to have started today.

Under the plea agreement, it is expected that Riel will continue her mental-health treatment in a secured facility, said Kalamazoo County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Michael Kanaby.

Riel is to be sentenced Nov. 21 by Schma. A hearing will be held to determine whether Riel will be sentenced as an adult or a juvenile. It's anticipated she will be sentenced as a juvenile, the prosecutor said.

"The whole thing is to protect society and for her to get treatment," Kanaby said after the plea was entered.

Neither the stabbing victim nor her family members were in court Friday.

Riel told police she took the knife to school planning to kill someone. On the school bus on the way home, she stabbed the girl sitting in front of her, according to the police report. She stabbed the girl, whom she did not know, about eight times and stopped only because the girl ran to the front of the bus.

# **Panel turns focus to local homeless**

## **Group looks to build on generosity shown to hurricane victims**

By Stacey Range and Nicole Geary  
Lansing State Journal

September 27, 2005

A group of 24 area health, human services and neighborhood organizations will begin meeting next week to look at ways of channeling the community's generosity toward Hurricane Katrina victims and focus it on local people in need.

The committee, announced Monday by Lansing Mayor Tony Benavides, was formed in response to frustrations raised by local homeless people who saw an outpouring of aid and coordinated community action to help resettle Katrina evacuees in recent weeks.

"We need to find out whether we can keep that high level of commitment or something similar for our own poverty stricken," said Willard Walker, director of Human Relations and Community Services for the city.

Walker will lead the committee with John Melcher, associate director of the Community and Economic Development Program at Michigan State University. Participating agencies include the Ingham County Department of Human Services, the Greater Lansing Homeless Resolution Network, the Lansing School District and Advent House Ministries.

Lansing has resettled 114 Katrina evacuees into 70 furnished apartments and a network of services.

Officials said many evacuees have enrolled their children in local schools and are beginning to find jobs. More than 15 public and private agencies have stepped up to meet their basic needs, from clothing and spending money to physical and mental health check-ups.

St. Vincent Catholic Charities, which has led the efforts, doesn't anticipate receiving more evacuees from Fort Custer in Battle Creek.

However, officials said they're ready to help potential evacuees from Hurricane Rita and individuals displaced by Katrina who still might come to Lansing on their own.

Part of the community's response to the local needy could include re-creating a program that has linked evacuees with residents for guidance, said one of its coordinators, Linda Sims.

Patrick Patterson, director of operations for the Volunteers of America's homeless day center, applauded the city's efforts.

"It's a real problem," Patterson said. "I'm glad to see the city is concerned about this and is providing some leadership on it."

### **How to help**

These agencies still are accepting financial donations to help cover local Hurricane Katrina relief efforts:

- St. Vincent Catholic Charities: 323-4734
- Capital Area United Way: 203-5000

## Local aid

- A committee formed to look at ways to help local people in need will meet at 10 a.m. Oct. 5 at 1111 Michigan Ave. in East Lansing.

Contact Stacey Range at 377-1157 or [srange@lsj.com](mailto:srange@lsj.com). Contact Nicole Geary at 377-1066 or [ngeary@lsj.com](mailto:ngeary@lsj.com).

# Homeless pair face charges in robberies

## U-M students stabbed in second of 2 recent Ann Arbor robberies

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

BY AMALIE NASH

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Police arrested a homeless couple suspected of two street robberies, including one early today in which a University of Michigan student was stabbed in the chest as she struggled for her backpack. Police said the 21-year-old woman was not seriously injured.

The robberies, both of which targeted female students, occurred on the same street Saturday evening and early today, police said. Detective Sgt. Richard Kinsey said the methods of the robberies and unique description of the robbers led police to conclude the incidents were likely related.

"These were some of the dumber robbers we've had, based on the evidence we found," said Kinsey, but he declined to elaborate.

In this morning's case, the female student was returning to her apartment in the 1000 block of East Ann Street at 1:10 a.m. when a woman grabbed her bag off her shoulder, reports said. The victim told police she tried to pull the bag back from the woman and felt something stick her in the chest, police said.

The robber ran off with the backpack, containing a cell phone, books and wallet, reports said.

The student was believed to be stabbed with a small folding knife and was taken to the U-M Medical Center with a non life-threatening injury, police said. Officers later located the knife and other items from the backpack in the area.

Officers said they found a 43-year-old woman covered in leaves and dirt walking in the area. She claimed that she was hiding from her husband, and officers soon located her husband, 41, reports said. They were arrested in connection with this morning's robbery and a similar incident in the 1300 block of East Ann Street Saturday evening.

Kinsey would not discuss what evidence police have tying the couple to the crimes, but said officers believe they were involved in both cases.

In Saturday's robbery, an 18-year-old U-M student said she was leaving a pizzeria to return to her dormitory room when a couple sitting at a table asked her for directions to the U-M Hospital, reports said. She said they followed her as she entered a construction zone on East Ann Street, then boxed her in and demanded money, police said. The robbers fled with \$2 and the woman's bank card, student ID and a dormitory key, reports said.

Amalie Nash can be reached at [anash@annarbornews.com](mailto:anash@annarbornews.com) or (734) 994-6832.



# Home-buying gambit

## Mayor's spending scheme not designed to benefit Flint

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

Flint's last-minute plan to sink unspent federal money into houses for low-income families and hurricane evacuees sounds almost whimsical.

But it's no flimsy matter that if the city does not find a use for the \$1.4 million in question quickly, it will miss a block grant spending deadline and be forced to return the money to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Mayor Don Williamson's staff suggests Hurricane Katrina might have brought a reprieve with an emergency rule change that speeds approval of some projects aimed at assisting evacuees. This created a possible window in which Flint could meet an Oct. 31 deadline and avoid turning back the money, if federal authorities would go along with the housing purchase.

Some City Council members are balking at the startlingly strange plan, as is well justified. Many unexplained facets need scrutiny, including who would really benefit financially if the city bought 20 to 30 homes through real estate agents and resold them - as the plan calls for - at reduced prices to qualifying people.

Flint sorely needs to fill vacant real estate, but the Genesee County Land Bank, which has acquired thousands of properties through tax delinquencies, should have plenty to offer hurricane victims as well as local people in need.

The entire notion seems so fraught with defects that it is not far-fetched when some council members suggest the plan might be no more than a ploy to force the council to reject it, so the council would be blamed when the block grant money is lost.

This event is but one more chapter in Flint's ongoing struggle to spend its block grant money, the most dramatic so far being Williamson's withholding of funds from nonprofit agencies that he accused of being poorly run. The financially desperate city has had so many problems spending these dollars that some council members want Genesee County to take over their administration. We've been against such a move because it was based solely on the council-mayor feud rather than well-thought-out policy. But this latest stunner bolsters the case.

# Stop Stalling on Affordable Housing

Editorial

The New York Times

Published: September 27, 2005

The gargantuan task of finding permanent housing for the hundreds of thousands of people displaced by Hurricane Katrina will require a policy shift in Congress, which has spent the last several years savaging federal housing programs. A good first step would be to pass the Federal Housing Finance Reform Act, a new oversight bill for the federally backed mortgage giants, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

An affordable housing fund would be financed by tapping into a small portion of the after-tax profits of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. It would provide vital new capital for low-income housing, and the money would initially be directed into the area ravaged by Katrina.

The bill would require Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to focus their considerable powers more heavily on poorer communities, making it similar to the successful Community Reinvestment Act, which requires banks to provide services to poor areas. The reinvestment act has made available a staggering \$1.5 trillion to poor communities, mostly to nonprofit groups that build affordable housing for the disabled and the elderly.

The housing reform bill, which was passed by the House Financial Services Committee by a 65-to-5 margin, has yet to come to the floor. In part, that is because ideologues in the House argue that it violates free market principles. That's ridiculous. With the need for housing growing more urgent by the day, the House should end its bickering and pass this bill.

# Lawmakers push for heating aid increase

## Rising costs could leave thousands cold

By Chris Andrews and Bill Theobald  
Lansing State Journal

September 27, 2005

WASHINGTON - Political and social service leaders are pushing for a multibillion-dollar increase in federal funding to help poor people heat their homes this winter as two devastating hurricanes further drive up energy prices.

Some predict that an already stretched-thin public and private safety net of heating assistance could snap this winter, leaving tens of thousands of poor people without heat in Michigan.

Sens. Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow, both Democrats, joined 39 senators earlier this month in asking the Senate Appropriations Committee to increase by \$1.3 billion funding for the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program. The program received \$2.2 billion last year.

In the House, Reps. Dale Kildee, John Dingell, Sander Levin, John Conyers, all Democrats, and Republican Dave Camp were among 81 House members proposing a \$2 billion increase.

Congress is expected to make a decision on the funding level in the next several weeks.

The Michigan Public Service Commission estimates that the average natural gas bill in the state this winter will increase by \$39 to \$65 a month, spokeswoman Judy Palnau said. Nearly 80 percent of Michigan households use natural gas. As far as heating oil, costs today are about \$2.50 a gallon, up about a third from a year ago.

The aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita are adding to concerns that prices will go higher still.

"Most people were kind of holding off because they thought energy prices would be going down," said Dan Webster, manager of Avery Oil and Propane in Dimondale. "Now everybody is filling their tanks."

### Out of aid funding

The state uses money from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program in three ways: to provide a heating credit that results in payments directly to providers, to provide emergency aid and to provide weatherization assistance.

This fiscal year, which ends Friday, the state has processed more than 384,000 claims for home heating credits and paid out \$67.7 million, up from 349,000 cases totalling \$61.2 million a year earlier.

The state ran out of money for the relief program in July. Officials say money will again be available when the next fiscal year begins Saturday.

For Maria and Robert Dobbie of South Lyon, a few hundred dollars in heating assistance made all the difference a few years back when health problems forced Robert off his job building basements.

Maria Dobbie said they resorted to using credit cards to buy food and make bill payments but eventually got so far behind that their utilities were shut off.

"We had to decide between food and paying that bill," said Maria, whose family lived in one room and used a generator for three days for electricity.

Dobbie's family qualified for the state's home heating credit and received \$700 through The Heat and Warmth Fund, a private charity, and were able to restart their utilities.

### **Charities fill gaps**

Kathleen Walgren, executive director of The Heat and Warmth Fund, said her group has been trying to mount a grass-roots campaign for more federal heating assistance because there are limits on what the private sector can do.

The charity provided about \$4.5 million in assistance to 15,000 households in 2003-2004, according to the organization's Web site.

"We try to fill in between the cracks, but those are pretty wide gaps," she said. "I think there is going to be a huge issue in October and November. There are going to be tens of thousands of people with no heat."

Jennifer Salazar's family had to do without hot water or a working stove for three weeks when Consumers Energy shut off gas in her Lansing home in August because they were behind in payments.

She said she couldn't get assistance from the state but that eventually she got help through St. Vincent DePaul and Capital Area Community Services, and had service restored.

She has a newer, more energy efficient furnace now but still is worried about heating costs and took a class to learn how to reduce energy costs.

"I heard natural gas prices are going up just as much as gasoline, so it is definitely a concern," she said.

### **Weatherization backlog**

Michigan's Department of Human Services, which administers the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, spent all of the state's \$117 million allocation helping more than 1 million people by the end of July, spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said.

Michigan spends about two-thirds of its federal allocation in home heating credits that are paid directly to the utility. The rest of the money provides emergency assistance and weatherization.

Walgren said previous increases in heating costs have put additional pressure on food banks, health clinics and other agencies that help the poor.

Capital Area Community Services has seen the number of people seeking heating assistance jump from 241 in July to 605 in August.

"The majority of the low-income people are fixed income or are at a minimum wage or near minimum wage job," said center coordinator Phil Thompson. "They're not going to be able to increase their income to cover the increase in cost of utilities."

Capital Area Community Services has a two- to three-month backlog of people waiting for weatherization assistance.

"People are much more serious about getting their home weatherized than previously," said Duane Griffus, who runs Capital Area Community Services' weatherization program.

"Unfortunately, many of them wait until the cold weather hits and they get their first higher fuel bill before they sign up."

### **On the Web**

- [www.mcaaa.org](http://www.mcaaa.org): Michigan Community Action Agency Association site with links to local agencies that provide home heating assistance and weatherization.

- [www.thawfund.org](http://www.thawfund.org): The Health and Warmth Fund, statewide nonprofit that provides heating assistance to low-income families.
- [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs): Michigan Department of Human Services. Click on Assistance Programs for information about the home heating credit, emergency relief and weatherization.

Contact staff writer Chris Andrews at 377-1054 or [candrews@lsj.com](mailto:candrews@lsj.com). Contact Bill Theobald of the Gannett News Service at (202) 906-8134 or [wtheobald@gns.gannett.com](mailto:wtheobald@gns.gannett.com).

## LOCAL COMMENT

# Group homes can benefit neighbors, up to a point

By GEORGE GALSTER  
AND JAMES HAMILTON

**"N**ot in my back yard" again has collided in Detroit with "rights of the disabled." At issue is whether supportive housing developed for populations with special needs should be permitted in neighborhoods inhabited primarily by families. Both sides of this issue have valid concerns. Fortunately, there is a middle ground toward which we should strive.

According to a recent Free Press article, Yvette Willingham is sure that the adult foster care home she has renovated in Highland Park is a positive addition to the neighborhood ("Why neighbors don't like this house," Sept. 14). She has cleaned it up and given it a fresh coat of paint, and it does look good. Certainly one could argue that Highland Park needs more homes that are in such a good state of repair.

Neighbors Ronald and Sandra Jones, however, are distressed at having an AFC home across the street in a family-oriented neighborhood of fine, old homes. They are concerned that too much supportive housing is already concentrated in Highland Park. Perhaps they envision the frightening image of East Grand Boulevard, the most extreme case of clustering of AFC facilities in a residential neighborhood in Detroit.



George Galster



James Hamilton

Do AFC facilities and other supportive housing boost the neighborhoods in which they are developed, or do they depress them, bring in crime and drive down property values? The answer is an empirical one, not a philosophical or emotional one. Research at Wayne State University in cooperation with the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C., provides clear answers. The study "Why NOT in My Back Yard?" statistically analyzed single-family home prices and crime rates before and after a variety of homes for special needs populations were developed in Denver, Colo., during the 1990s.

The evidence shows that both parties in the debate are partly correct. Having one or even a few supportive housing facilities in a neighborhood often, in fact, boosts property values while not raising crime. The reason seems to be exactly what Willingham believes: Very often supportive housing operators buy run-down properties and fix them up, which enhances the neighborhood. With only one or a few such facilities in a neighborhood, there are few noticeable problems with residents misbehaving. They can integrate into their host communities successfully, which is the goal of the public policy promoting deinstitutionalized living in such facilities.

The study also shows, however, that when too many supportive housing facilities cluster in a single-family

neighborhood, the effect is harmful. Property values are lower, and the neighborhood has more problems with concentrations of group home residents. Even without reproducing East Grand Boulevard in the extreme, the Jones family is correct to fear the negative effects of clustering too many AFC homes in one place.

The obvious solution is to limit — but not prohibit — the number of supportive housing facilities in single-family neighborhoods, and the obvious way to prevent harmful clustering is to have a minimum separation restriction. In many parts of the United States, single-family zoning requires that supportive housing facilities be 1,000 to 1,500 feet apart. Indeed, until 1996, such limits were legal in Michigan and offered protection to homeowners like the Jones family. Indeed, Denver has enacted such minimum separation requirements and they are working well to satisfy the interests of all parties concerned.

In 1996, however, the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals specifically prohibited cities from using any such separation restrictions on AFC homes. Marilyn Mitchell, the attorney for the Historic Boston-Edison Association in Detroit, writing in the fall 2004 issue of Michigan Real Property Review, points out that the court did not take a balanced approach in resolving conflicts between group homes and single-family neighborhoods. The Michigan Department of Social Services asked for a "rational basis" standard that incorporated a 1,500-foot separation requirement in order to prevent group home clustering and to further the goal of integrating the residents into the community. The 6th Circuit rejected this rational basis standard. No other federal circuit court has taken this extreme position. On the contrary, other federal circuit courts have

affirmed the rational basis standard and allowed distance separation rules. The bottom line is that the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals has not only failed to protect the interests of neighboring homeowners and families, like the Joneses, it has rejected the idea that they even have an interest worth protecting.

In fairness, the court did not have this information about how supportive housing facilities affect neighborhoods when it made its ruling. It decided simply on philosophical grounds, without making any attempt to balance the competing interests of homeowners and families on one hand, and de-institutionalized AFC home residents on the other. Now that factual information is available about the effects of supportive housing facilities on neighborhoods, the 6th Circuit should be asked to re-examine its rulings. The new information should be an adequate basis

for overturning a ruling that conflicts with the evidence.

**GEORGE GALSTER** is Clarence Hilberry Professor of Urban Affairs at Wayne State University. **JAMES HAMILTON** is Emeritus Professor of Economics at Wayne State University. Write to them in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 600 W. Fort St., Detroit, MI 48226.

The obvious solution is to limit — but not prohibit — the number of supportive housing facilities in single-family neighborhoods.

# **Lansing schools, county target absenteeism**

## **Parents of children with poor attendance may be ordered to take parenting classes**

By Susan Vela  
Lansing State Journal

September 27, 2005

Lansing's youngest truants are less likely to miss school under the community's young LEAD program, according to Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III.

Annual absenteeism has gone from 41 to 18 days for some elementary and middle school children in the first two years of the Lansing Elementary Attendance Diversion program, he said at a Monday press conference.

And more than 80 percent of LEAD's approximately first 180 participants have improved their attendance.

With school officials by his side, he said LEAD is needed to address schoolchildren's problems while they're still young.

"A habit of poor attendance follows a student until they are skipping or dropping out of high school," Dunnings said. "If those kids do not go to school, they will not learn."

Yet another statistic he released indicated that there has been at least one sign of waning success. In 2003, 88.6 percent of LEAD students improved attendance, but that number slipped to 77.5 percent with the 2004 group.

Superintendent E. Sharon Banks supports the efforts. When students aren't in class, "they're definitely not learning," she said.

A partnership between the prosecutor's office, Lansing schools and Michigan State University's School of Social Work helped kick off LEAD.

It targets families whose children accrue more than two weeks of unexcused absences or 30 tardies in a school year.

Parents are advised by the prosecutor's office to pay for and attend a parenting class, plus prove their children attend school regularly, or risk jail time and fines.

### **School count day**

- Lansing School District lost \$770,000 in state funds for 2003-04 because of kids not in school on count days.
- The 2005 count day is Wednesday. It determines 75 percent of state funding for Michigan's public schools. A February 2005 count determined the rest.

Contact Susan Vela at 702-4248 or [svela@lsj.com](mailto:svela@lsj.com).

# **Soup's on at St. Vinnie's new kitchen**

Jenny Lancour - [jlancour@dailypress.net](mailto:jlancour@dailypress.net)

September 27, 2005

ESCANABA - Soup, sandwiches and sweets were being served along with a lot of smiles on those happy to see St. Vincent de Paul's new soup kitchen in operation Wednesday.

Volunteers were busy preparing and serving food for the opening day of the soup kitchen at St. Vincent's new multi-purpose building, located at 815 1st Ave. N. Area residents and volunteers enjoyed the first meal of chicken noodle soup and a choice of a bologna or peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Everyone is welcome for lunch at St. Vincent's soup kitchen, which will be open every Wednesday from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., said Joe Salbert, district president. The soup kitchen serves more than just a meal, he added.

"It's not just about the food. It's about the socialization and the community within Delta County," Salbert said. "People who are alone and isolated will have a place to come."

The soup kitchen is open only on Wednesdays because the local Salvation Army's soup kitchen serves meals the other four days of the week, Salbert said.



# **Now's the time to come to aid of our charities Community's needy are at risk**

By MARK R. RUMMEL  
Port Huron Times Herald

September 27, 2005

One of our community's best moments undoubtedly is the effort to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Countless campaigns - from car washes to benefit concerts - clearly demonstrated we are with the people of the Gulf Coast in their time of need.

In this unprecedented effort to help, however, there also may be a drawback. With our attention focused on the welfare of Gulf Coast residents, there are pleas for assistance in our own back yard that risk being overlooked.

With food and other supplies to help the needy of this community diminishing, local charity leaders are asking the generosity directed south also be applied here.

"Our hearts go out to (the hurricane victims). But our hurricane is called unemployment," said Lonnie Stevens, director of the United Way of St. Clair County.

Indeed, St. Clair County's August jobless rate was more than 7%, higher than the state average of 6.3% - and the state's unemployment rate is among the highest in the nation. Worse, Port Huron's August unemployment rate was more than 10%, according to the state Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

The United Way launched its 2005 fund-raising campaign earlier this month. Its leaders hope to raise \$1.625 million, the same amount as last year. Although the money helps fund a variety of community services, in particular, it supports homeless shelters, food pantries and soup kitchens, essential threads of our community's safety net.

The United Way and other community groups are doing their best to help the weakest among us. Helping them is as important as helping Katrina's victims.

## **LOCAL DONATIONS**

### **HOW TO HELP**

To donate to the St. Clair County Chapter of the American Red Cross, mail or take donations to 615 Pine St., Port Huron, 48060. To give locally, donors should bring the donations in so they can specify where they want the money to go.

National donations also can be made online at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).

To give to the United Way of St. Clair County's 2005 campaign, call (810) 985-8169 to receive a pledge card.

To give to the United Way of Sanilac County's 2005 campaign, call (810) 359-7300.

For other local donations, contact the specific organization to which you would like to donate.

# Urie Bronfenbrenner, 88, an Authority on Child Development, Dies

By MARGALIT FOX  
The New York Times

Published: September 27, 2005

Urie Bronfenbrenner, an internationally renowned psychologist and authority on child development who in the mid-1960's helped found the federal Head Start program, which aids poor preschool children and their families, died on Sunday at his home in Ithaca, N.Y. He was 88.

The cause was complications of diabetes, according to Cornell University, where Dr. Bronfenbrenner was the Jacob Gould Schurman professor emeritus of human development and of psychology.

Throughout his career, Dr. Bronfenbrenner was concerned with the social forces that in his words, "make human beings human." He argued that an awareness of these forces, chief among them strong family ties, should underpin social policy affecting children and families.

"We think of the fact that learning is something you do in school, but what happens in a family enables you to learn in school," Dr. Bronfenbrenner told The Syracuse Post-Standard in 1996.

"Not because your parents are teaching you arithmetic, although that won't do any harm; it's because you learn from them how to relate to very complicated things."

A member of the Cornell faculty for more than 50 years, Dr. Bronfenbrenner was best known for his pioneering theory of the ecology of human development. Published in book form in 1979, the theory maintained that a person's development is the product of a constellation of forces - cultural, social, economic, political - and not merely psychological ones. In later years, the field Dr. Bronfenbrenner created came to be known as bioecology.

Dr. Bronfenbrenner was also known for his comparative studies of child rearing in other cultures, including the Soviet Union. Among his best-known books is "Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R." (Basic Books/Russell Sage Foundation, 1970), written with John C. Condry Jr. Reviewing the book in The New York Times Book Review in 1971, Jay Haley called it "a lively and readable book which is the most complete description of Soviet methods of child rearing and education yet available."

Urie Bronfenbrenner was born in Moscow on April 29, 1917, and was 6 when his family came to the United States. His father, a neuropathologist, got a job at Letchworth Village, an institution for the developmentally disabled in Rockland County, N.Y.

His work there left a lasting impression on Urie, who recalled his father's despair when New York City courts sometimes consigned healthy children to the institution.

"Before he could unwind the necessary red tape to have them released, it would be too late," Dr. Bronfenbrenner told The Washington Post in 1988. "After a few weeks as one of 80 inmates in a cottage with two matrons, their scores on intelligence tests administered as a compulsory part of the discharge process proved them mentally deficient: that meant remaining in the institution for the rest of their lives."

In 1938, Dr. Bronfenbrenner earned a bachelor's degree from Cornell, majoring in music and psychology. He earned a master's in education from Harvard in 1940 and, in 1942, a doctorate in psychology from the University of Michigan. During World War II, he was a psychologist in the Army. After the war, he taught briefly at Michigan before joining the Cornell faculty in 1948. Testifying before Congress on a proposed antipoverty bill in 1964, Dr. Bronfenbrenner argued that measures to prevent poverty should be directed in particular toward young children. His testimony produced an invitation to tea with the first lady, Lady Bird Johnson, to discuss the early-childhood programs he had seen abroad.

"There was clearly a gleam in Mrs. Johnson's eye and, as she told me on subsequent occasions, this was when her enthusiasm for something like Head Start was kindled," Dr. Bronfenbrenner told The Chicago Sun-Times in 1991.

Dr. Bronfenbrenner was appointed to a federal panel whose recommendations led to the creation of Head Start in 1965. Some 20 million children and family members have taken part in the program since its inception, The Associated Press reported yesterday.

Dr. Bronfenbrenner is survived by his wife of 63 years, the former Liese Price; two sons, Michael, of Seal Beach, Calif., and Steven, of San Anselmo, Calif.; four daughters, Beth Soll of Manhattan; Mary and Kate, of Ithaca; and Ann Stambler of Newton Center, Mass.; 13 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Among Dr. Bronfenbrenner's other books are "The Ecology of Human Development" (Harvard University, 1979) and, most recently, "Making Human Beings Human" (Sage Publications, 2005), which he edited.

In recent years, Dr. Bronfenbrenner warned increasingly of the breakdown of the social support systems that had once helped American children to thrive.

"We've got all kind of forces that are interfering and blocking the process of civilizing human beings and making them competent and responsible," he told The Syracuse Post-Standard in 1996. "As always, it shows itself first in the weakest link in the chain, the ones that are under the greatest stress, which are the poor."